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The CIA Speaks No Evil, Unless It So Chooses

The CIA would like us to believe that, though it may see evil and hear evil, it speaks no evil. Its policy, reaffirmed by the current director, William J. Casey, is that the CIA will "neither confirm nor deny allegations appearing in the media."

This is patently untrue. The spooks will, when they choose, rush to deny any hint in the press that they have misbehaved. For example:

- In August, charges were published that the CIA had been involved in the death of Marilyn Monroe 20 years earlier. An official CIA spokesman dismissed the accusations as untrue, even absurd.

- In July, Casey went on record with a categorical denial that the CIA had meddled in the Salvadoran elections. Any CIA involvement, he said, had been purely benign and open; there had been no dirty tricks to affect the elections.

- In January, 1982, the CIA went public to deny official agency involvement in the gun-running activities of its former agent, Edwin P. Wilson.

But when it suits its purposes, the spy agency will adhere stubbornly to

its policy of "no comment." A Greek exile leader named Elias Demetracopoulos has been butting his head against the CIA's stone wall for years in his attempt to prove that he was the victim of a covert smear campaign.

Suspecting that he had been defamed by political enemies, Demetracopoulos obtained CIA documents concerning him through the Freedom of Information Act. The material from the CIA files showed that charges against him, accusing him of communist leanings, had been refuted by the CIA.

Yet in 1977, The New York Times published an extremely critical story about Demetracopoulos, citing as sources unidentified "CIA officials" and agency "files."

By a not-so-funny coincidence, the Times story appeared just as the Senate was getting ready to investigate charges, by Demetracopoulos and others, that the CIA had close ties to the military junta which had ruled Greece several years earlier. Demetracopoulos had long been a thorn in the side of the military dictatorship.

In his dogged attempt to clear his name, Demetracopoulos enlisted the help of Rep. Les Aspin (D-Wis.) of the House Intelligence Committee. The congressman asked the CIA for information, which it agreed to provide.

But the material was useless. Aspin wrote Casey that the docu-

ments provided were "not only incomplete and unsatisfactory," but had been classified, which "made it impossible for me to follow up on it by reviewing the information with Mr. Demetracopoulos."

Aspin suggested a solution: have the CIA review its files and the Times story and write him "an unclassified letter that states flatly and clearly that, contrary to The New York Times article, the agency has concluded that there is no basis on which to impeach Mr. Demetracopoulos' honesty."

Casey replied with the old refrain about agency policy "to neither confirm nor deny allegations appearing in the media." My associate Lucette Lagnado obtained copies of the correspondence.

The CIA did, however, publicly deny that it had given any information to the Times reporter for his 1977 article.

Footnote: Demetracopoulos has taken his case to court. In an unusual move, Aspin has asked the presiding judge to declassify the documents the CIA gave him on the Demetracopoulos affair.

Salute to a Pro: Leo Durocher to the contrary, nice guys don't always finish last, even in Washington. President Reagan certified this when he appointed Jack A. Gertz, for 22 years the Bell System's man in Washington, to the National Commission for Employment Policy.